

Visible Evidence proposal  
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Marseilles Vieux Port in context  
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While best known for his work in photography and design, László Moholy-Nagy made several films which remain under-studied and under-appreciated. This proposal is for a screening of his major film work, with particular emphasis on “Marseilles Vieux Port” with a critical introduction.

I know of only one media scholar who has written on Maholy-Nagy’s film work: Jan-Christopher Horak in *Making Images Move: Photographers and Avant-Garde Cinema*. An informal survey of some Visible Evidence regulars revealed a complete ignorance of this body of work. Fortunately, the Museum of Modern Art (NY) has a 40 minute compilation of the major film work, including : Ein Lichtspiel: Schwarz-weiss-grau (1929) Impression vom alter Marseilles Hafen (1929), Berliner stilleben (1930) and Gypsies (1932). My proposal is to introduce the film program (10 min), screen the films, and have a discussion. Ideally it would be helpful for comparison/contrast to screen Vigo’s *À propos de Nice*, a film completed slightly after the Marseilles film.

A briefer alternative would be to introduce and screen only “Marseilles Vieux Port.” (c. 20 min. total). Alternatively, it would be possible to simply give a 15 minute presentation on a panel, but given that the film is not widely known, and not readily available, this is not very appealing.

The point of my analysis is to point out that the dominant expectation of Maholy-Nagy is to associate him with constructivism and the Bauhaus, and to note that his creative and theoretical work has been revived with a renewed interest in art and technology issues circulating in the current discussion of new media. But in this context, it is unexpected to find his work addressing social/political issues of poverty and discrimination. I argue that a better analysis frames his work in the context of other innovative late Weimar artists such as Hans Richter, who moves from abstraction to social commentary (as well as Dada expression), and Irwin Piscator, with whom Maholy-Nagy had a close relation as a stage designer. I offer a modest corrective to Horak’s critique that Maholy-Nagy’s films do not offer sufficient class analysis, arguing that in their historical context, they are politically astute.